FreePint®

Contents

HTML Version
   <http://www.freepint.com/issues/111104.htm>

Fully Formatted Acrobat Version
   <http://www.freepint.com/issues/111104.pdf>

About FreePint

   FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

   Joining is free at <http://www.freepint.com/> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

   Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive this fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <http://web.freepint.com/>.

Guest Editorial

With Online Information a little over two weeks away it's a very busy time for all of us on the event organising team, but I've been an enthusiastic reader of FreePint for years and so I was really honoured when William asked me to provide the first ever Guest Editorial.

The invitation made me think back over the years that I've been reading FreePint. I have a confession to make -- I always print out my copy and read it on the train. This method of 'consumption' suits the particular need that I have for the information that FreePint provides. It's all about matching user needs, a subject explored further in a new report on information auditing published today <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>.

Report author Steve Wood gives you a taster of how to get started with an information audit in his article in this issue. Getting senior management buy-in is one of the golden rules to ensure the success of any information management initiative, and effective communication is key to securing this. Also in this issue, Rob Ashton's article 'How to improve your business writing' provides useful practical pointers and reminders that we would all do well to bear in mind.

I was struck this week by a profile of Douglas Engelbart which appeared in Business Week Online. You may not have heard of Engelbart -- he invented the computer mouse and was a pioneer of the graphicaluser interface. He is now 78 and still working and innovating. What impressed me was Engelbart's observation that in the modern world human beings find it hard to keep up with the increased complexity of the problems we face, and technology on its own isn't the answer.

In recent years, information delivery has been transformed by remarkable technological innovations and changes in consumer habits. However, there is no substitute for the hands-on experience that you get in the 'face-to-face' environment of a conference and exhibition like Online Information. You can try out products, ask tricky questions, and meet customer service teams. You can network with peers and associations, learn new skills at seminars, and get a sense of where the industry is headed in the year ahead at the conference. Like the computer mouse, it's simple and incredibly effective. I look forward to meeting you at the show and hope that it, as with this issue of FreePint, matches your user needs.

Katherine Allen
Director Information Division
VNU Exhibitions Europe

Online Information 2004 :- More information and free exhibition tickets are available at <http://www.online-information.co.uk>.

FreePint Jobs -- a great place for information vacancies.

Vacancy Searching -- Free search and sign up to the Job Update.

Vacancy Recruiting -- Complete the form and advertise a vacancyfor just GBP195

50% discount for registered charities.

10% discount for agencies.

Find out more today at <http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

FreePint Jobs
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

The FreePint Jobs Update is being circulated widely every two weeks. This free newsletter now has 2,000 direct subscribers and is posted at the Bar and in the Bar Digest (circulation 12,000).

To see the Jobs Update No.84 and read the new 'Jobs Advice' section, visit <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30502>. To subscribe, modify your account at <http://web.freepint.com>.

Fully-formatted PDF version available at: http://web.freepint.com/jobs/FreePint-Jobs-Update-84.pdf

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Corporate Finance Researcher
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j3623>
Great job for junior with knowledge of company structures & some online experience, accountancy firm, Birmingham, GBP22k.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Business Analyst / Researcher
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j3645>
Business Researcher/Analyst with strong accounting / financial modelling and report writing skills for newly created vacancy.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Knowledge co-ordinator
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j3646>
Assistant to work with our Global Knowledge Manager to further develop a knowledge service for the Enterprise IG network.
Recruiter: Enterprise IG

[The above jobs are paid listings]

NB: There are 39 other jobs in the current edition of the Jobs Update <http://www.freepint.com/go/30502>.

PLANNING YOUR NEXT CAREER MOVE? CILIP CAN HELP
We can support you all the way through from university to your next plum job. We're one of the biggest organisations for information professionals in the world. Here for you and thousands like you. Helping you stay informed and employable. Want to find out more? Just email your contact details to findoutmore@cilip.org.uk and add 'FreePint' for a special discount on your first year's subscription. Or visit <http://www.cilip.org.uk/freepintoffer> for more information.

NEW: Information Auditing: A guide for information managers"
ISBN: 1-904769-08-X

This in-depth report is published today by FreePint. Find out more at:

<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>

Online Information Exhibition FREE visitor pre-registration
30 Nov - 2 Dec 2004, Olympia, London, UK
The world's no. 1 event for information content and information management solutions - over 250 exhibitors, case-studies, independent masterclasses, networking events, careers talks and panel debates.
<http://www.online-information.co.uk>
PLUS Conference discounts available to association members!
http://www.online-information.co.uk/ol04/conf_prog/conf_prog.html

Introducing MINT - a fresh approach to company information from Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing

To register for a FREE trial visit <http://www.mintbusinessinfo.com>

Companies, news, industry research and directors in a single easy to use information database for research, sales, marketing and business development professionals.

VIP compares Dialog NewsRoom to Factiva and LexisNexis

Following the recent Factiva / LexisNexis comparative review, the current VIP compares them both with Dialog:

<http://www.vivavip.com/>

"What better editorial team could there be than the people behind FreePint to report on products and news in the information market!"

CILIP: your own space...

We all need our own space once in a while; sometimes to relax, to think, or maybe to plan a career. We know how important this is to you. But you don't have to do it alone.

Imagine a group of people dedicated to helping you make your plans a reality. People who can keep you up to date with the latest developments, help you hone the skills you need to stay competitive, tell you about the latest job opportunities. People like us in fact.

With our exclusive services for members, you can get daily briefings and search archives of information on the issues that affect you. You can enjoy valuable discounts on our books and workshops. And you can gain your own professional qualification - an internationally recognised seal of quality.

Whatever your plans, we're here for you and thousands like you. If you'd like to know more about CILIP and what we can do for you, email findoutmore@cilip.org.uk for a free membership pack.

cilip

Chartered Institute of
Library and Information
Professionals

www.cilip.org.uk - now even more reasons to belong

My Favourite Tipples
by Bill Raschen

- I use <http://www.intranetjournal.com> for keeping up to date with Intranet developments. The tutorials are also well worth checking out.

- The CSS site <http://www.csszengarden.com/> demonstrates some amazing use of stylesheets for web site design.

- I use <http://www.digital-creativity.org.uk/> for its excellent 'Photoshop' tutorials. Strongly recommended for bolstering your graphics skills.

- The Astronomy Picture of the Day site http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html is an essential lunchtime bookmark - even if you have no knowledge or great love of astronomy.

- SolStation <http://www.solstation.com/> gives details on nearby stars. The site also has 3D star maps, invaluable should you get ost within 50 light years of Earth.

Bill Raschen is an Information Professional and Web designer whose experience has included project managing and managing intranets for large organizations.

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

SIGN UP TO FACTIVA'S NEWSLETTER

Keep up to date on Factiva and information industry trends by signing up for the free InfoPro Alliance newsletter. This monthly email will provide you with tips on how to better use Factiva, more information about Factiva sources, and link you to other items of interest to global information professionals.

Go to <http://www.factiva.com/infopro/register> and sign up today!

How do YOU use DigBig?

"What a fantastic service! One URL was 843 characters and the new one is 23 -- 97% shorter! Makes it a lot easier for people to go to the link. Thanks!" Realtor

Read how other people use DigBig to shorten long Web addresses: <http://www.digbig.com/testimonial.html>

FREE PINT BAR
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

We are looking forward to the end of the month -- it's our annual face-to-face meet up with FreePinters at the Online Information show in London <http://www.online-information.co.uk/>. Although it's a busy few days, it's not really the place to go to get answers to really specific research questions -- that's when you need to go to the Bar. FreePint is serving up some 50,000 pages per day now, so it's certainly busy there too.

Information professionals will be the main contingent at Online Information, as they are at the Bar. There are currently enquiries about text retrieval software and alternatives to DBTextworks/Inmagic <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30539>. Do you know of a Web site or publication that lists company filing requirements for EU countries? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30531>. What about details of STM publishers in Spain and France? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30528>. Staying within the EU, you might be interested in a report on the digital preservation of scientific research <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30494>.

A brand new report is published today by FreePint on Information Auditing <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>, and the excellent Internet Resources Newsletter (IRN) is available for November <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30471>. FreePint's sister company Willco <http://www.willco.com/> is proud to provide support to IRN by distributing the email edition of the newsletter.

Can you add to the excellent suggestions for alternative library classification systems to Dewey? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30430>. Or can you help someone wanting to take an overview course in KM and IT? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30472>.

Remember to check out the VIP Wire regularly <http://www.vivavip.com/> for the latest information-related press releases, or sign up to the weekly Wire Digest. Also, if you're associated with a company or organisation in the information industry, then make sure to post your press releases at the Wire.

On to more general questions, and do you know of an aggregated newsfeed on mobile phone-related topics? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30546>. Have you used Google's 'Search Appliance'? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30529>. Any views (and there are already a number) on one FreePinter's wish to start a mailing list service? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b30284>.

A student would like some input to their dissertation on the opinions of young people in regard to copyright laws, (e.g. when downloading music) <http://www.freepint.com/go/s4257>. What about whether loyalty schemes actually improve loyalty? <http://www.freepint.com/go/s4251>. A student is daunted by the online document for NHS ethical approval -- has anyone already worked their way through it?<http://www.freepint.com/go/s4250>. Finally, a postgrad studying for an MSc in Information and KM at Loughborough would like some advice on mapping out a career, either in the UK, Hong Kong or Macau <http://www.freepint.com/go/s4249>.

It's great to see things picking up at the Student Bar after the summer lull. I would urge students on information and business-related courses to make the most of the Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student/> as it's a great way to tap in to the extensive experience of the FreePint community. If you run a course then do request a pack of free FreePint beermats <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28933>.

William Hann <william.hann@freepint.com>
Managing Editor, FreePint

Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <http://web.freepint.com/>.

Tips Article

"How to Improve your Business Writing"
By Rob Ashton

Robert Ashton <info@writing-skills.com> is Managing Director of Emphasis Training Ltd, which specialises in business-writing skills. The company is leading a drive to improve written communication in business and regularly runs courses on all aspects of business writing. Recent clients include The Environment Agency, Ernst & Young, BUPA, Grant Thornton and Gillette. You can find more tips on effective business writing at <http://www.writing-skills.com>.

Do you remember those 1980s print ads for shorthand and secretarial training? They featured an illustration of a pen scrawling words onto a notebook, the copy reading something like, 'If yu cn rd ths, yu cd b on yr wy to a new jb'. Secretarial shorthand was, and still is, a recognised business skill. But recently both business leaders and various media items have expressed concern over more modern shortcuts in business writing.

The voice of British business, the CBI, recently voiced unease about literacy standards in UK companies. Their annual CBI-Pertemps employment trends survey (Sept 2004) revealed that 33 per cent of firms found that they needed to give school-leavers basic training in literacy and numeracy over the past twelve months <http://www.cbi.org.uk>.

Employers spend over GBP 23bn each year on training, and the CBI research shows this amount is rising every year. Digby Jones, CBI Director-General said: 'Too many school leavers are failing to make the business grade. A fundamental working knowledge of English and Maths provides a vital foundation for every day-to-day business task. But the education system is letting down many young people and leaving them unprepared for the world of work.'

A Text Too Far

Although some blame a general slip in educational standards, progress in technology can also be a factor. Computer spell- and grammar-checkers, although useful tools, can be a poor substitute for actually learning the right way to do things.

The way we communicate in the 21st century may also be to blame. A survey by Emphasis Training <http://www.writing-skills.com> found that text-slang frequently appears in business communications. Britons send around 2 billion text messages a month (Source: Mobile Data Association June 04, <http://www.mda-mobiledata.org>). It's no surprise then that the language acceptable for one method of communication is sneaking its way inappropriately into another.

This huge increase in text as a communication tool means that spelling and punctuation mistakes are common, particularly in business emails. Think about how many emails you have to plough through in a day. It's easy to become deeply absorbed, typing as quickly as possible to finish the task and get that email sent. We easily forget rules such as apostrophe-use and commas, as the ease of abbreviating in 'text writing' becomes second nature. The Emphasis survey found that common text abbreviations such as 'cd' for 'could', 'c u' for 'see you' and '2'

for 'to' or 'too' are regularly appearing. All make the writer seem slapdash, informal and amateurish.

It's Not Just Emails

The research revealed that one in five of the business documents that companies receive each day is carelessly written and unclear.

Global Markets

Communicating clearly and effectively is increasingly important as globalisation means that you now have to get your message across to markets all over the world. As Digby Jones recently commented: 'Today's workplace is a challenging and fast-moving environment ... The globalised economy in which the UK operates takes no prisoners'.

Many businesses abroad may prefer to use American English, so it's useful to note the disparities. Barbara Wilson, a business writing specialist, has worked with companies both here and in the U.S.. She comments, 'Apart from the obvious differences in grammar and punctuation, I find that the majority of American business writing is more verbose than its English counterpart. American business people tend to be concise and to the point when speaking, but less direct when writing'.

The Economist <http://www.economist.co.uk> style guide also highlights these distinctions between American and English writing. They note that 'Many American words and expressions have passed into the language ... Some are short and to the point, but many are unnecessarily long'.

A good rule of thumb to follow in business writing is to always put yourself in your reader's shoes. Remember, if you haven't met your reader or spoken to them by phone, your written work will be all they have to go on. They can't see your smart business suit, hear the professional manner of your voice or visit your place of business. But they will be left with the impression that they're dealing with someone who is unprofessional if care is not taken with content, spelling, tone and punctuation.

FreePint

Ways to Improve your Business Writing

1. Establish your core statement - imagine you are going on TV for a three-minute interview. Could you sum up the value of your topic in three minutes? Write yourself a short piece (fewer than 30 words) that you could use as a memory aid to help you sell your topic to the interviewer. Try using it to clarify your thoughts on the issue while speaking to a colleague. This will help you keep the main message in mind when you're doing the writing itself.

2. Put your reader first - do they know much about the topic? Will they understand your jargon or acronyms? How important is this information to them? How interested are they in it? Are there any grammatical or style features you should consider if your reader is based outside the UK?

3. Make your beginning memorable - if you don't grab your reader at the beginning of the document, you are wasting your time. Getting a reader started is the most difficult part of writing, but there are techniques you can use. Try starting with a surprise statement for instance, or contrasting how things were in the recent past with how they are now (in two or three sentences).

4. Go out with a bang - good endings are almost as important as good beginnings. The last thing you want to do is leave the reader with the impression that you've just run out of things to say. Useful techniques are: looking to the future, repeating a major issue or summarising. But be careful with the last one: keep that summary to two or three sentences.

5. KISS - keep it short and simple. Write to express, not to impress. No flowery language. Good ideas come across much better in plain English.

6. Write in the active voice - that means: write the person or subject before the verb. 'The researcher received the company archive' is better than 'The company archive was received by the researcher'.

7. Make your sentence structure logical - say what the sentence is about straight away, before you add in extra information. Say what's happening, before you say why.

8. Use graphics where possible - we all learn in different ways. Some people like written explanations, while others are more 'visual' and prefer graphics and illustrations. Pictures are therefore a great way of drawing visual people into your document. (Be careful with clip art, though as this can look tacky). So, use a graph rather than a table of data, for example.

9. Stick to two fonts - use one serif font (e.g. Times) for the body text and one sans serif font (e.g. Arial) for headings and subheadings.

10. E-mail - limit messages to one screen and use attachments for longer messages.

New UK company products to be reviewed in VIP

This month's issue of VIP will review two new important company information products - CompanyQuery from CorpfinWorldWide and Bureau van Dijk's MINT. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made between CompanyQuery and FAME. December's VIP will examine and review Business Monitor Online.

<http://www.vivavip.com/>

Email newsletter and forum hosting

Willco provides support to many companies and organisations in the information world to help them distribute email newsletters and run online forums.

Find out more about the benefits and read testimonials at:

<http://www.willco.com/>

Tell us what you REALLY think

All the sites on our network have 'Suggestion Boxes' on their Contact Page.

Please use this facility to give us your anonymous comments, suggestions, corrections and feedback.

FreePint's Suggestion Box is at: <http://www.freepint.com/contact.htm>

FreePint Events :: Free publicity for your event

If you're associated with an information-related event, anywhere in the world, then make sure it has a free listing in FreePint Events:

<http://www.freepint.com/events/>

Caryn Wesner-Early is a librarian who is contracted to the United States Patent Office for database and Web searching.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the FreePint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/garage.htm>

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0131471481/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0131471481/freepint00>

- "Web Search Garage" ISBN 0131471481, published by Prentice Hall PTR. * Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the FreePint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

- Read about other Internet Strategy books on the FreePint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/strategy.htm>

- To propose an information-related book for review, send details to <bookshelf@freepint.com>.

FreePint Bookshelf
<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

"Web Search Garage"
By Tara Calishain
Reviewed by Caryn Wesner-Early

This book explores more aspects of Internet searching than I realized existed! As one might expect from the co-author of Google Hacks, it is somewhat Google-centric, but not as much as it might be. The reason for most of that emphasis is that Google (used correctly) is a powerful, flexible search system, not that Calishain is a Google booster.

The book begins with an overview of full-text search engines, exemplified by Google, and indexes, exemplified by Yahoo. It explains the difference between the two types of search tools, then gives quick descriptions of each of the two 'main players', including special syntaxes, shortcuts, etc., related to each. The second chapter covers other search tools, describing which type they are, how to search them, and why one might wish to use one of them rather than Google or Yahoo.

Some of the topics covered may look self-evident to professional searchers, and are the kind of things we might forget to mention to others. The chapter on the importance of vocabulary to get good results might elicit a "well, duh!" response at first, but even advanced searchers may discover new tips. For instance, even after years of looking for jargon on the Internet, I never tried 'means' as a search term. 'Proppant means' didn't get me directly to a definition, but it pointed me right and gave me helpful search terms, which is what Calishain recommends it for.

There are chapters on searching groups, lists and blogs, finding associations, and using existing organizational structures like ZIP codes to find information. One of the most helpful chapters for me was on why to use special syntaxes like 'inurl:' and 'site:'. I'd gone to seminars and read

articles about how to use these, but wasn't already using them and couldn't see how they'd improve search results. After reading this chapter, though, I've used them more often.

International readers probably won't get as much out of this book as Americans will. Part of that is the nature of the tools - Google's ZIP Code search, for instance, works only in the US. However, much of the information would be useful anywhere in the world.

Although this book isn't intended to be read cover to cover, it flows fairly well if you choose to do so. The index is very good, and makes an already useful book even more so (especially as the chapter titles aren't always helpful). Screen shots clarify a number of points in the text. There is no Web page associated with the book, but purchasers will get a six-month subscription to ResearchBuzz Extra, the paid version of Calishain's excellent free resource, ResearchBuzz (usually USD 30/year, USD 20 for librarians).

As a long-time reader of the ResearchBuzz, I expected a lot from this book, although wasn't sure I'd learn much because of my long history of Internet searching. However, I now have tabs sticking out from many pages, and will turn to this book when asked for types of searches I don't usually see. I highly recommend it for all levels of searcher.

VIP Digests for the Wire and Lounge

Keep up-to-date with the latest information-industry press releases and opinion with a free email digest account for the VIP Wire and VIP Lounge.

Find out more at <http://www.vivaVIP.com/order/digest/>

FreePint

Contributors to this issue:

William Hann (FreePint Managing Editor), Penny (FreePint Administrator), Katherine Allen, Robert Ashton, Bill Raschen, Steve Wood, Caryn Wesner-Early,
Plain Text <http://www.plain-text.co.uk/> (proofreading).

Advertisers/Sponsors of this issue:

Enterprise IG, Cilip, BvD, VNU Exhibitions, Sue Hill Recruitment, Glen Recruitment, Factiva, Willco, VIP.

© Free Pint Limited 1997-2004

Contact

WEB: www.freepint.com
EMAIL: support@freepint.com
SUBSCRIPTIONS: subs@freepint.com
AUTHORS: www.freepint.com/author.htm
ADVERTISERS: www.freepint.com/advert.htm
ISSN: 1460-7239

Free Pint Limited
4-6 Station Approach
Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 2QN, United Kingdom
Tel (UK): 0870 141 7474
Tel (Int): +44 870 141 7474

Technology by Willco
<http://www.willco.com/>

Feature Article

"Information Auditing: Key Concepts and How To Get Started"
By Steve Wood

This article is an introduction to the new in-depth report published today by FreePint: "Information auditing: a guide for information managers" ISBN 1-904769-08-X <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>.

Introduction

The organisations we work in are increasingly dependent on information, the information systems that enable the information lifecycle (from creation to destruction) and people who have skills to manage information. The term 'information overload' is a concept many organisations will readily identify with. According to research conducted by Reuters in 1997, 55% of British and American managers were worried about making poor decisions, in spite of all the information at their disposal.

So what is information auditing? Chaffey and Wood describe an information audit as "an evaluation of the usage and flows of information within an organisation". A more detailed definition from ASLIB Information Resources Management Network described an information audit as "a systematic examination of information use, resources and flows, with a verification by reference to both people and existing documents, in order to establish the extent to which they are contributing to an organisation's objectives".

The term 'audit' sometimes can have a restrictive connotation; Trudy Katz decided to use the term corporate information centre survey instead when using information audit techniques to implement a new information center for Mastercard International in New York.

Key Features of an Information Audit

Assessing the various methods employed by organisations and discussed in literature, the following key features of information audits can be ascertained:

- What should be: A form of information needs analysis derived from examining organisational objectives and business processes.

- What is: An assessment of the information resources created, acquired and used in the organisation, including an understanding of how information flows through the organisation. Including the role of people and information systems.

- Gap analysis: An analysis of what should be against what is.

- Recommendations for action: a report or similar document containing recommendations and actions focused upon eradicating the gaps in terms of organisational priorities. Broken down into short and long term actions.

- Actions: The actions will be fully realised in forms of new organisational policies, procedures, strategies, and systems.

- Performance measurement: The setting of indicators and targets to measure the effectiveness of action related to business objectives.

- Repeat audit process: Cycle will depend on business need.

Information Auditing - Leading Thinkers

Although information auditing is not yet a fully defined discipline, such as financial auditing, there have been some important texts and articles that have helped set the ground for a common approach. The leading thinker is Liz Orna, who has published two seminal texts on the topics: "Practical Information Policies" and "Information Strategy in Practice". I reviewed the latter in FreePint 168 <http://www.freepint.com/issues/141004.htm>. The approach developed by Orna focuses on using organisational objectives as the starting point, analysing what information is required to

---

Steve Wood is a Senior Lecturer in Information Management at the School of Business Information, Liverpool John Moores University. Steve lectures on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on the subject areas of e-business, information management, knowledge management, content management and freedom of information. He is also responsible for editing and maintaining the popular freedom of information website, "Freedom of Information Act blog" at <http://foia.blogspot.com>.

Steve also consults and trains on information management and e-business issues with SMEs and large organisations. His textbook, co-authored with Dave Chaffey entitled "Business Information Management: improving performance using information systems" will be published by FT Prentice Hall November 2004 <http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/>. Contact Steve by email to <steve_wood62@hotmail.com>.

Gold

- FreePint No.148 6th November 2003. "Records Management, the Aunt Sally of your business!" and "Getting UK Immigration Information and Advice" http://www.freepint.com/issues/061103.htm

- FreePint No.125 14th November 2002. "Teaching In China" and "FreePint talks to Jakob Nielsen" http://www.freepint.com/issues/141102.htm

- FreePint No.100 15th November 2001. "Digital Content on the Web" and "Untangling The Web For Health Professionals" http://www.freepint.com/issues/151101.htm

- FreePint No.75, 16th November 2000. "Music and the Internet Revolution" and "Business Information for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises" http://www.freepint.com/issues/161100.htm

- FreePint No.50, 18th November 1999. "Information on tap - Web resources on the water industry" and "Electronic Communities" http://www.freepint.com/issues/181199.htm

- FreePint No.26, 12th November 1998. "Web Site Promotion Ideas" and "CD-ROMs and the Web" http://www.freepint.com/issues/121198.htm

- FreePint No.1, 6th November 1997. "Back to Searching Basics" and "Major Sources of Business Information on the Internet" http://www.freepint.com/issues/061197.htm

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

meet these objectives. The other key text is by Sue Henczel: "Information audit: a practical guide". Her text offers a practical methodology with the following components:

● Planning
● Data collection
● Data analysis
● Data evaluation
● Communicating recommendations
● Implementing recommendations

What Makes an Information Audit Successful?

The following are the golden rules for successful information audits:

1. Identify agreed objectives for the audit with key stakeholders in the organisation; they may have key business roles and key roles in the information lifecycle. The objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely).

2. Use organisational objectives as the drivers for developing the audit objectives and questions.

3. Do not try to use an audit methodology or software "off the shelf" - the audit must be tailored to the organisation.

4. Make sure the audit does not have too many purposes that may lead to conflicts of stakeholders.

5. Understand the scope of your audit - who are you going to audit and why?

6. Make sure high-level organisation commitment is achieved at the start of audit. Sell the benefits.

7. Select an audit team with a mix of skills from across the organisation, including information management, systems, IT, HR and project management.

8. Don't view the audit as a one-off; it is a repeatable process. Use the audit data as a resource to be reused as a future benchmark. Identify a future event or regular point in the organisational calendar to carry out audits.

9. Think carefully about the suitability of using questionnaires or interviews for your audit - think about the nature of the organisation, the timescale and likely validity of results.

10. Communicate the findings widely and use as the basis for practical action related to information policies, strategies and systems.

Understanding the Different Purposes for Information Auditing

The most common purpose for an information audit is related to auditing information against business objectives. The aim of the process will be to discover how information can be used more effectively in meeting organisational objectives. In the short term, the following benefits may be targeted:

● Identification of redundant or duplicated information not meeting business need leading to cost savings

● Identification of information required, countering immediate threats, e.g. new competitors, new legislation

● Making new information content available to key stakeholders

Over the longer term the following benefits will also be targeted:

● New strategic direction for information use within the organisation

● Aligned strategies for information management and systems

● Better decision making related to technology deployment

● Realigned business processes making better use of information

● An integrated view of information assets within the organisation and how they relate to each other

● A change in information culture within the organisation with regard to information sharing and use

● New information products that can be made available externally

The other purposes for which organisations use information auditing include:

● Records Management

● Capturing information management best practice

● Legal compliance, e.g. Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998

● Intranet development

● Migration to content management systems

The Information Audit in Action

An information audit should make use of traditional methods such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, to ask questions related to the objectives and purpose of the audit. The audit should be staged, starting with a pilot, feeding back improvements into the process.

Software can be a valuable aid to the information auditor, whether in the form of more basic tools already available to an organisation, such as Microsoft Word, Excel or Access or more specialist tools such as Audit Toolkit <http://www.audit-toolkit.com>.

Presenting and Communicating the Results

The results of the audit must be communicated

across the organisation, usually in the form of a report. The report should draw out the key findings of the audit and not bury these findings in too much detailed data - this should be made available, but placed in annexes or appendices for those who require access.

In order to then gain commitment for resources to carry out the actions and recommendations that will flow from the report, the audit should be presented and explained to senior management.

Using the Audit to Develop an Information Policy and Strategy

Many organizations will focus upon information policies and strategies as the key outputs from the information audit process (defined as objectives at the start of the audit). By understanding the information gaps identified in the audit, an organization can focus on articulated methods to improve the problems identified.

Orna offers the best definition of an information policy as being: "A policy founded on that organisation's overall objectives, and the priorities within them". It is a document that sets out in a general sense the information that is important to the organisation and what is expected of people and systems in managing information.

An information strategy is an articulation of the how and when of the principles and concepts set in the information policy. It will set out the objectives and priorities related to information and organisational objectives.

Getting Outside Help

An often-asked question by organisations that have decided to carry out an information audit is: "Should we carry the audit out in house or use consultants?" There is no simple answer to this question -- the best starting point is to look at the skills and resources available within the organisation first, and then assess what value consultants can add. Consultants may be able to help with two aspects -- the planning and execution of the audit itself, or the training of staff so that they can then carry out the audit. Some the key players in this market in the UK are TFPL <http://www.tfpl.com>, Instant Library <http://www.instant-library.com> and ASLIB <http://www.aslib.co.uk>

Resources

Chaffey, D and Wood, S. 2004. Business Information Management: improving performance using information systems. FT/Prentice Hall. Harlow.

Di Mattia, S. and Blumenstein, L. 2000. In search of the information audit: essential tool of cumbersome process? Library Journal, 03/01/2000. Vol. 125, Issue 4, p48.

Henczel, S. 2000. The Information Audit as a First Step towards Effective Knowledge Management: An Opportunity for the Special Librarian. Paper presented at the Global 2000 Worldwide Conference on Special Librarianship, Brighton, 16 - 19 October 2000. Available online at: <http://www.fh-potsdam.de/%7EIFLA/INSPEL/00-3hesu.pdf>

Henczel, S. 2002. Information audit: a practical guide. Gale.

Orna, E. 2004. Information Strategy in practice. Gower and Orna, E. 1999. Practical Information Policy. Gower. Aldershot.

This article is an introduction to the new in-depth report published today by FreePint: "Information auditing: a guide for information managers" ISBN 1-904769-08-X

FreePint Forthcoming Articles

* User employee abuse of the Internet * Personalisation * European industrial relations * Networking On and Offline * Advanced searching techniques using linguistic analysis * Competitive Intelligence * Environmental Regulation *

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

Events

United Kingdom:

- Electronic copyright 25th November <http://www.freepint.com/go/e389>

- Knowledge and information exploitation in defence 29th - 30th November <http://www.freepint.com/go/e383>

- Planning the Planning - A guide to implementing e-learning - Organised by e.learning age Magazine 23rd November <http://www.freepint.com/go/e394>

- Mapping Social Networks in Organisations 29th - 30th November <http://www.freepint.com/go/e386>

Canada:

- Gartner Symposium/ITxpo 2004 4th - 7th November * e-Enterprise WorldExpo Hosted by WowGao 16th - 17th November <http://www.freepint.com/go/e275>

Australia:

- Gartner Symposium/ITxpo 2004 4th - 7th November * Strategic planning for EDRM in Government 30th November - 1st December <http://www.freepint.com/go/e376>
- Aligning IT with Business Goals 30th November - 1st December <http://www.freepint.com/go/e377>

This is just a selection from the 21 listings in FreePint Events. For your free listing, complete the form at <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

Penny <penny@freepint.com>